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DEPT FOR NEA, NEA/IAI, AND SMEC

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [GZ](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: HAMAS DEBATES FUTURE

REF: TEL AVIV 10899 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY:

¶1. (C) OUR CONTACTS IN GAZA HAVE PRESENTED DIFFERING VIEWS OVER NEXT STEPS BEING CONTEMPLATED BY HAMAS. A SENIOR FATAH LEADER AND MEMBER OF THE FATAH CENTRAL COMMITTEE, HANI AL-HASSAN, TOLD US RECENTLY THAT HAMAS WAS PLANNING AN "ELECTION" FOR MEMBERS OF ITS POLITBURO AND CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY. AL-HASSAN SAID HE WAS SEEKING TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION, WHICH, HE SAID, WOULD PIT OUTSIDERS AGAINST INSIDERS. AL-HASSAN SAID HE FEARED THAT HAMAS COULD SPLIT FOLLOWING THE ELECTION, LEAVING THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENT OF HAMAS IN UNCERTAIN HANDS. BY CONTRAST, ISLAMIST WEEKLY "AL-RISALLAH" EDITOR GHAZI HAMAD, TOLD US THAT WHILE HAMAS IS INDEED DEBATING ITS FUTURE, NO ELECTION WILL BE HELD IN THE NEAR TERM. HAMAD SAID HAMAS FACED INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES AND SAID THAT YASIN WAS FACING A "HEAVY BURDEN" TO ATTEMPTING TO MANTAIN UNITY AND INFLUENCE HIS ORGANIZATION'S FUTURE COURSE. BOTH HAMAD AND AL-HASSAN SAID THEY DID NOT FORESEE "MILITARY OPERATIONS" IN THE NEAR TERM, ALTHOUGH THEY OFFERED DIFFERENT REASONS FOR THEIR VIEWS. END SUMMARY.

AL-HASSAN: GET READY FOR SEPTEMBER 19

¶2. (C) EMBASSY CONTACTS IN GAZA HAVE PROVIDED DIFFERING VIEWS OF HAMAS' NEAR-TERM STRATEGY. HANI AL-HASSAN, A MEMBER OF THE FATAH CENTRAL COMMITTEE WHO HAS MAINTAINED CLOSE LINKS TO PALESTINIAN ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS THROUGH HIS FORMER MEMBERSHIP IN THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, EXPRESSED CONCERN TO US THAT HAMAS FACED A SPLIT IN THEIR ORGANIZATION. AL-HASSAN SAID HAMAS WAS PLANNING TO HOLD AN ELECTION ON SEPTEMBER 19 FOR ITS POLITBURO AND MAJLIS SHURA (CONSULATIVE ASSEMBLY). (COMMENT: OTHER AGENCY REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE SEPTEMBER 19TH DATE HAS ALREADY SLIPPED, PERHAPS AS FAR BACK AS DECEMBER. DELAY UNTIL DECEMBER MAY PLACE THE ELECTIONS NEAR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2ND PHASE OF WYE, POSSIBLY NOT A PROPITIOUS TIME FOR AN ELECTION FROM HAMAS' POINT OF VIEW IF THINGS ARE GOING WELL IN THE PEACE PROCESS. PLACE OF THE ELECTION IS NOT KNOWN. END COMMENT.) THE ELECTION WOULD PIT KHALID MISH'AL AGAINST ABU MARZOUK FOR THE HEAD OF THE POLITBURO. AL-HASSAN SAID HE WAS WORKING UNDER ARAFAT'S ORDERS TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION AND TO PREVENT A SPLIT IN HAMAS THAT COULD LEAVE THE RADICALS WITHOUT THE MORE "MODERATE" POLITICAL CONTROL OF SHEIKH YASIN. "IRAN WILL GAN THE UPPER HAND," AL-HASSAN SAID IF THERE IS A SPLIT IN THE ORGANIZATION. (COMMENT: AL-HASSAN'S COMMENTS RUN COUNTER TO THE POLICY TH PA HAS BEEN TELLING US THEY ARE FOLLOWING TOWARD HAMAS, I.E., O SPLIT OFF THE MODERATES, ISOLATE THE RADICALS AND MOVE AGAINST THEM. END COMMENT.)

MISH'AL LEADS THE CHARGE AGAINST YASIN

¶3. (C) ACCORDING TO AL-HASSAN, THE KEY DYNAMIC INSIDE HAMAS WAS AN EFFORT BY KHALID MISH'AL TO SEIZE CONTROL OF THE PARTY FROM YASIN. AT THE ELECTION, YASIN WILL

TRY TO PUSH FORWARD A CHANGE TO HAMAS' OPERATING PROCEDURES THAT WOULD REQUIRE EXPLICIT BLESSINGS OF THE INSIDE LEADERSHIP BEFORE CONDUCTING "OPERATIONS." (COMMENT: WE DO NOT SEE THE LOGIC OF SUCH A MOVE. WHILE ON ITS FACE, IT MIGHT GIVE YASIN GREATER SPECIFIC AUTHORITY TO CONTROL "OPERATIONS," THERE IS A CLEAR DOWNSIDE. IF KNOWN, IT WOULD EXPLICITLY TIE THE INSIDE LEADERSHIP TO ANY FUTURE TERRORIST OPERATION AND LEAD TO AN EVEN HEAVIER CRACKDOWN AGAINST HAMAS OPERATIVES IN AREAS UNDER PA CONTROL.) AL-HASSAN SAID THAT THE MISH'AL FACTION CURRENTLY ENJOYS A TWO-PERSON ADVANTAGE IN THE POLITBURO. YASIN WAS CONTEMPLATING SENDING MAHMOUD ZAHHAR AND POSSIBLY ISMAIL ABU SHANAB TO INFLUENCE HAMAS MEMBERS IN THE GULF AND ELSEWHERE TO SUPPORT YASIN IN THE ELECTION. (COMMENT: PERHAPS THE USG FACES A TERMINOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN REFERRING TO "INSIDERS" AND "OUTSIDERS." WE TEND TO THINK OF OUTSIDERS AS BEING MORE HARDLINE AND CLOSER TO THE MISH'AL POSITION. IN FACT, IF WHAT AL-HASSAN SAYS IS TRUE, YASIN BELIEVES HE CAN INFLUENCE THE OSTENSIBLY "OUTSIDER" VOTE TO SUPPORT HIS MORE "MODERATE" POSITION.)

AL-HASSAN ON WHO'S HOT AND WHO'S NOT

¶4. (C) SPEAKING ABOUT VARIOUS HAMAS PERSONALITIES, AL-HASSAN SAID THAT MAHMOUD ZAHHAR IS CLOSELY TRUSTED BY YASIN. IN THE WEST BANK, YASIN RELIES ON JAMAL MANSOUR FROM NABLUS. AL-HASSAN SAID THAT FUGITIVE MOHAMMED DEIF WAS STILL AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF HAMAS, BUT FOLLOWED ORDERS FROM YASIN WHO, ACCORDING TO AL-HASSAN, IS AGAINST "OPERATIONS" AT THIS TIME. DEIF IS VERY INTELLIGENT AND AL-HASSAN SAID HE WAS CONTINUALLY CUTTING OFF CONTACT WITH THOSE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO LEAD THE PA TO HIM. AL-HASSAN ALSO SAID THAT SAID BAREKAT, FORMERLY OF THE PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD (PIJ), IS INCREASINGLY INCLINED TO ACCEPT THE PEACE PROCESS AND IS NOW ACTIVE IN A GROUP FOUNDED BY AL-HASSAN THAT HAS MET WITH ISRAELIS IN THE PAST. AMONG OTHER PIJ MEMBERS, AL-HASSAN CHARACTERIZED SHELLAH AS "NOT A REAL FIGHTER" AND SAID THAT RAMADAN "COULD BE EASILY BOUGHT OFF."

HAMAD: NO ELECTIONS

¶5. (C) ALTHOUGH HAMAD AGREED THAT HAMAS IS FACING SOME DIFFICULT DECISIONS, HE SAID THERE WERE NO PLANS TO HOLD ELECTIONS. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, HAMAD SAID, AN ELECTION WOULD MERELY FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION AND WAS THEREFORE UNWISE. HAMAS IS FACING THE SAME ISSUES IT HAS BEEN CONSIDERING FOR THE PAST YEAR. CHIEF AMONG THEM IS HAMAS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PA AND THE DEBATE OVER HOLDING "MILITARY OPERATIONS." YASIN IS TRYING TO REPAIR THE BREACHES IN THE WALLS OF HAMAS UNITY AND FEELS INCREASINGLY THAT HE IS UNDER A HEAVY BURDEN. YASIN, WHILE NOT RENOUNCING TERROR ATTACKS, WANTS TO MOVE HAMAS INTO A MORE PURELY POLITICAL DIRECTION.

HAMAS' LONG-TERM STRATEGY

¶6. (C) HAMAD SAID THAT PERSONALLY HE DID NOT FORESEE RENEWED TERRORIST ATTACKS, DESPITE CONTINUED CLAIMS OF HAMAS' ALLEGIANCE TO "ARMED STRUGGLE." HAMAD ADDED THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR HAMAS "TO REMAIN QUIET" IN THE FACE OF ARRESTS AND CONTINUED DETENTION OF THEIR MEMBERS. BUT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, HAMAS UNDERSTOOD THE CRACKDOWNS THAT WOULD FOLLOW ANY ATTACKS WERE A HIGH PRICE TO PAY.

¶7. (C) POLITICALLY, HAMAD DISCOUNTED THE POSSIBILITY OF A SPLIT WITHIN HAMAS. AS HAMAD HAS SAID IN THE PAST, HAMAS DIFFERS INTERNALLY ON THE QUESTION OF TACTICS, BUT REMAINED COMMITTED TO THE "IDEA OF HAMAS" (I.E., OPPOSITION TO OSLO AND TO ANY COMPROMISE WITH ISRAEL).

HAMAD SAID THAT THE BASIC HAMAS STRATEGY WAS TO WAIT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS TO FAIL. AT THAT POINT, IT WOULD NOT BE AN ISSUE OF HAMAS TAKING UP ARMED STRUGGLE ALONE, ALL PALESTINIANS WOULD TAKE UP ARMED STRUGGLE AND HAMAS WOULD BE THE BEST POSITIONED TO LEAD IT.

HAMAD ON HAMAS PERSONALITIES

18. (C) HAMAD ALSO COMMENTED ON SOME HAMAS PERSONALITIES. ON DEIF, HAMAD SAID THAT HE REMAINED "BELOVED" AMONG PALESTINIANS BECAUSE OF THE TOLL HE EXACTED FROM ISRAEL. BUT HE CHARACTERIZED DEIF AS BEING "OUT OF THE PICTURE" FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS. HAMAD ALSO SAID THAT RANTISSI, DESPITE HIS RE-ARREST, REMAINED VERY STRONG AND THAT TIME IN JAIL WOULD NOT DIMINISH HIS STRENGTH.

COMMENT:

19. (C) ISRAELIS ARE WORRIED THAT THE RECENT UPSWING IN SMALL-SCALE OPERATIONS PORTENDS A MUCH LARGER WAVE OF ATTACKS TO COME. ACCORDING TO OUR INTERLOCUTORS IN GAZA, SUCH IS NOT THE CASE. RATHER THEY POINT TO THE RE-ARREST OF RANTISSI, THE BRIEF INCARCERATION OF ISMAIL ABU SHANAB, AND EVEN 12 HOURS HAMAD HIMSELF SPENT ENJOYING JIBALI'S HOSPITALITY AS EVIDENCES OF A PA CRACKDOWN. (HAMAD WAS DETAINED AFTER HE QUOTED NEW PA ATTORNEY GENERAL ZOUHAIR SOURANI CRITICIZING THE STATE SECURITY COURTS.) ALSO, PA OFFICIALS ARE QUOTED IN THE ISRAELI MEDIA AS SAYING THEY HAVE DETAINED 90 HAMAS ACTIVISTS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS IN RESPONSE TO HAMAS ATTEMPTS TO ATTACK ISRAELIS. ON THE QUESTION OF ELECTIONS, WE TEND TO CREDIT HAMAD. HAMAS LEADERSHIP WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY TRY TO WORK OUT DIFFERENCES PRIVATELY RATHER THAN ALLOW DIFFERENCES TO AIR IN ANY SORT OF SEMI-PUBLIC MANNER. IF AND WHEN YASIN MANAGES TO SORT OUT THESE DIFFERENCES, AN ELECTION MIGHT SERVE HIS INTERESTS BY DEMONSTRATING HIS CONTINUING CONTROL OVER THE ORGANIZATION.

SCHWARTZ